



10.17 Sitting/loitering/activity space in Leicester Square

## Control and surveillance

At the time of the survey, the main signs of control and surveillance were those traditionally found in urban public spaces elsewhere – council signs and services – together with the typically British phenomenon of CCTV monitoring. A total of 39 CCTV cameras were found in the study area, compared to just six in Times Square. Leicester Square alone contained at least 19 cameras, some of which were movable, some of which could cover 360 degrees.

As many users of the space report that the CCTV cameras make them feel safe and therefore more inclined to use the square and its businesses more often (EDAW 2001), it could be argued that these cameras are less an instrument of control and exclusion than facilitators of commerce, of interaction and of public space use, and thus of civility. The counter argument is that in spaces such as Leicester Square, with their strong appeal to consumption-orientated leisure, CCTV cameras, increasing surveillance and the potential regulation of impromptu activity are in fact constraining notions of civility and community by tying them to ideas of safe consumption. This display of civility and consumption combined can also be seen in the use of the public space by many eating and drinking establishments.

A survey of the position of Leicester Square wardens and police officers was completed on the same day and times as the survey in Times Square, a Saturday at 10.00am, 2.00pm, 6.00pm, 9.00pm and 1.00am. Significantly, very few management figures were in evidence: two wardens in or around the gardens at 2.00pm and 6.00pm, a single policeman

walking through Swiss Court, also at 2.00pm, and a pair of policemen on the south side of Leicester Square at 6.00pm. At Piccadilly Circus, a police van was parked on the pedestrianised area near Eros, and another was present from 6.00pm through to 1.00am in the junction between Coventry Street and Swiss Court. Compared to Times Square, there was comparatively little presence of control and management agents, even though weekends are generally a busy period. This absence of visible security has since been acknowledged as a problem by both Westminster City Council and the Metropolitan Police, and with the advent of the BID, the visible presence of management agents has greatly increased (Heart of London 2004b, 2007).

But, just as many of the CCTV cameras contributing to the surveillance of public space were privately owned, so too was some of the human security infrastructure. For example, many of the restaurants and bars in the area had bouncers and security of their own, including three security staff on a Saturday night in the Swiss Court McDonald's.

## User behaviour

Finally an observation study of human movement, activity and behaviour in the London study area also sought to explore users' perception and interpretation of the public space and its ambience. Activity and behaviour was recorded, as for Times Square, over one week, to produce an activity/behaviour table, a sample from which is given in Table 10.1.

The most obvious difference between behaviour in the London study area and Times Square related to the consumption of alcohol. In London, alcohol was being consumed at all times of day, and the nightlife was nearly all alcohol-based, with pubs, bars and clubs serving until late. The law in the UK allows drinking in the street, unlike in New York where it is illegal and the ban is strictly enforced. A large variety of people were engaged in drinking, from the local homeless community, to tourists, to groups of office workers. On the Friday and Saturday nights, when this was far more intense, the result was an area that felt raucous, reeked of alcohol, and featured significant amounts of drink-related rubbish.

Due to pedestrianisation, street life in terms of performers and musicians was more prolific than in Times Square. Musicians on the north terrace were generally of a high quality, with traditional Chinese music, rock ballads, jazz and Latin music. Performers varied from circus-style tricks to mime artists. Others included a regular three-card monte man, and henna tattooists. All this gave Leicester Square a hustle and bustle that seems to have been removed from Times Square.